

Alexa Will Handle It

Beatrice was sitting at the sun-flooded kitchen table having her first morning cup of coffee when she heard a knock and someone came into the house.

"Hi, Auntie Bea. It's Julia. I've come to set up your wi-fi connection, Alexa and other apps like we talked about."

"Oh, my dear. I didn't expect you today. But it's always good to see my favorite niece."

After setting down her backpack, Julia gave her aunt a hug and a kiss on her cheek.

"You're so far out of town. I've often wondered if you aren't lonely, afraid of being, maybe even dying, alone?"

"I'm never lonely, my dear. And, I have no fear of death, rather of living too long."

"You still seem so young. I admire your resilience, especially when you have to drag your oxygen tank around with you all the time."

"Well, my life is ebbing, as all will, and my usefulness is greatly diminished. But that doesn't overshadow the wonderful journey I took to get here. I'm happiest when I think back over that journey in solitude."

"I think I can understand."

"A lovely poem was written by your great grandmother's dearest friend Louise Kidder Sparrow many, many years ago. It explains where I am in my life. May I recite it for you?"

"I'd love to hear it."

"It's called *Fresh Delights* -

*When one has reached the blissful state
Of simply BEING, not of DOING
Has found the time to meditate--
The time for thoughtful self-renewing;*

*Then does rare harmony take place,
Surcease of urgent, active striving,
One finds release, a calm, a grace,
That lends a fresh delight to living.*

*Among the novelties of age ---
--- New ways of thinking, feeling, seeing ---
Are benefits which now engage
The golden hours of simply ---- BEING!"*

"That's beautiful!"

"Just being is now my state of bliss," Beatrice said as she reached across the table to take Julia's hand.

"You know, I still have an answering machine. There are people I might not feel like talking with, but I don't want to offend them by cutting them off. Can Alexa handle that?"

"With this app she will answer for you and record any calls that come in. It can be programmed to sort through callers and block the ones you don't want to have calling anymore."

"I'm a bit concerned about having Alexa in my house, I don't want her to be listening to my conversations, maybe spreading rumors. And, I don't want her constantly interrupting me."

"We can program her to do and hear what you want or don't want. She'll be a very discreet companion, just doing what you ask."

Julia set up the wi-fi network, made sure the apps that she'd installed were up and running, and demonstrated for her aunt how they worked. Beatrice became intrigued by the apps and all that Alexa could do, and quickly learned the basics. Having her coffee machine connected to the wi-fi network was especially appealing. What a luxury it would be to have her coffee ready when she'd finally made it to the kitchen each morning, portable oxygen tank in tow.

"If you want me to come back, Auntie Bea, I'll come as soon as I can, between classes."

"Thank you, dear. I'll let you know. I'm looking forward to getting to know Alexa. I think we'll become great friends."

Over several weeks, Beatrice used Alexa and the installed apps. Alexa woke her up in the morning with a cheery, "Good morning, Beatrice. Your coffee is ready." Alexa played some of Beatrice's favorite music while she napped. She read books to Beatrice and answered the phone. She adjusted the temperature and turned off the kitchen lights.

Beatrice began talking with Alexa, as she had with her cats over the years, telling her her plans for the day, asking her what she should make for dinner, and "discussing" the weather. She told Alexa about her difficulty breathing and her painful joints. She even said, "Good night, Alexa," as she put her book down and turned out the light.

Beatrice had always been self-sufficient, and never wanted to bother others if she could manage both her health and her home by herself. She was a good carpenter, plumber, even

electrician, all skills she learned from her husband Hal. She had proudly and single handedly maintained their house after he died.

As she was getting ready for bed, she heard a most annoying sound, the bathroom faucet dripping. Though her knuckles hurt, she tried her darnedest to turn the water off at the tap, but a leak also seemed to be coming from under the sink with a wet spot spreading on the bottom shelf of the cupboard. Since she was unable to get up from the floor - getting down was easy, getting up impossible - she couldn't fix it. She couldn't maneuver the stairs to the basement to turn off the water to the bathroom. And, she sure as hell wasn't going to call a plumber.

As she complained out loud about the annoyance of it all, she heard Alexa say, "I didn't understand that. Would you please repeat."

Rather than answer, she readied her bed for sleep, plumping the pillows, arranging the comforter, and putting her glass of water on the bedside table.

"Alexa, I have found your limit - and mine."

Just after Beatrice swallowed the handful of pills she had kept from Hal's final days, she said, "Alexa, when you're ready, it's time. Lights out."

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